

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8876
INFO AMCONSUL LENINGRAD
AMCONSUL MUNICH
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY WARSAW

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 04267

E.O.11652:XGDS-4
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SUBJECT; SOVIET LEADERSHIP: APPEARANCES, NON-APPEARANCES
AND RUMORS

REF: (A) MOSCOW 3891, (B) 77 MOSCOW 1889, (C) 77 MOSCOW
2446, (D) LENINGRAD 748 (NOTAL), (E) MOSCOW 2611

1. BREZHNEV CONTINUES HIS ACTIVE ROUND OF OFFICIAL AND
SOCIAL APPEARANCES. DAY AFTER BREZHNEV APPEARED ON SOVIET
TELEVISION ON OCCASION OF STOPH MEETING (REF A) HE WAS
SEEN BY EMBASSY WIFE AT MARCH 7 BOLSHOI THEATER
CELEBRATION OF WOMEN'S DAY. ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT SPEAK AT
THE BOLSHOI EVENT, BREZHNEV SAT THROUGH ENTIRE PERFORMANCE
(MORE THAN THREE HOURS) AND FREQUENTLY INDULGED IN
ANIMATED CHATS WITH HIS POLITBURO COLLEAGUES. VIEWED
THROUGH OPERA GLASSES FROM BOX ACROSS THEATER FROM HIM,
BREZHNEV APPEARED IN GOOD HEALTH.

2. IN MARCH 9 TV NEWS BROADCAST OF BREZHNEV MEETING WITH
PLO LEADER ARAFAT, BREZHNEV ALSO LOOKED WELL. TV
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COVERAGE SHOWED HIM GREETING ARAFAT THEN MOVING QUICKLY
AROUND THE CONFERENCE TABLE (IN CAMERA VIEW THIS TIME)
TO HIS OWN SEAT, AVOIDING THE CLUMSINESS OF THE STOPH
MEETING. BREZHNEV WORE GLASSES AND WAS SHOWN CARRYING ON
"SUBSTANTIVE" CONVERSATION WHILE ARAFAT TOOK NOTES.

3. GROMYKO REAPPEARED MARCH 9 AT MEETING WITH ARAFAT IN

KREMLIN. HE WAS LAST SEEN IN FEBRUARY 23 PRAVDA PICTURE OF KREMLIN JUBILEE MEDAL AWARDS CEREMONY. IN MARCH 9 TV NEWS COVERAGE GROMYKO LOOKED RESTED AND VIGOROUS.

4. POLISH CONGEN IN LENINGRAD TOLD US CONGEN, MARCH 9, THAT ROMANOV BECAME ILL AFTER HANOI VISIT AND DOCTORS

ESTIMATE HE WOULD BE OUT AT LEAST TEN DAYS (REF D). CHABELSKI IS A SENIOR PARTY OFFICIAL AND IS REPORTEDLY RETURNING TO WARSAW TO WORK IN CENTRAL COMMITTEE APPARATUS. HE COULD BE EXPECTED TO PAY FAREWELL CALL ON ROMANOV, BUT CHABELSKI SAID HE WILL SAY HIS FAREWELLS TO SECOND SECRETARY U.F. SOLOV'YEV INSTEAD, WHICH LENDS SOME SUPPORT TO CLAIM THAT ROMANOV MAY BE ILL.

5. ROMANOV LAST REPORTED PUBLIC APPEARANCE WAS AT FEBRUARY 27 LENINGRAD MEETING OF KOMSOMOL, LABOR UNIONS AND WORKERS. HE ALSO WAS PRESENT IN MOSCOW FEBRUARY 23 AND 24 FOR A KREMLIN RECEPTION IN HONOR ARMY'S SIXTIETH AND SS PRESIDIUM PLENARY. SO, IF HE DID RETURN FROM HANOI ILL (FEBRUARY 21) HE NONETHELESS AVOIDED MISSING ALL PROMINENT APPEARANCES EXCEPT THE KREMLIN JUBILEE AWARD CEREMONY FEBRUARY 22.

6. THE MOST RECENT RUMOR OF KOSYGIN'S BAD HEALTH COMES TO CONFIDENTIAL

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US FROM A ROMANIAN EMBOFF. THE ROMANIAN TOLD US MARCH 10 "IN STRICTEST CONFIDENCE" THAT HE HAD BEEN TOLD BY SOVIET SOURCE (NOT IDENTIFIED) THAT PREMIER KOSYGIN HAD ASKED TO BE RELIEVED OF HIS RESPONSIBILITIES "FOR REASONS OF HEALTH." WHEN PRESSED TO SUBSTANTIATE INFORMATION ROMANIAN ADMITTED HE HAD ONLY ONE SOURCE. HE ALSO HINTED THAT UPCOMING APRIL CPSU CC PLENUM MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TIME AND PLACE FOR SUCH A CHANGE.

7. UKRAINIAN FIRST SECRETARY VLADIMIR SHCHERBITSKY FAILED TO APPEAR AT THE UKRAINIAN CELEBRATION OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATIONS ON MARCH 8. SHCHERBITSKY'S NAME WAS MISSING FROM THE PRAVDA UKRAINY LIST OF UKRAINIAN POLITBURO MEMBERS ATTENDING THE CEREMONY. THE PRESENCE OF A REPUBLIC PARTY HEAD ON SUCH AN OCCASION IS NORMAL. ALL OTHER MEMBERS OF THE UKRAINIAN POLITBURO WERE IN ATTENDANCE. THE MOST LIKELY EXPLANATION OF THE ABSENCE IS ILLNESS, ALTHOUGH, COMING AS IT DOES ON THE HEELS OF OTHER INDICATIONS THAT HE MAY BE SLIPPING, HIS ABSENCE COULD HAVE POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE. (WE WILL HAVE A MORE DETAILED MESSAGE ON SHCHERBITSKY SOON AFTER CHECKING WITH KAP.). TOON

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